Creation Care in a Maasai Context

Prepared by Mwl. Lais Joseph

Lesson Plan #2) Maasai Creation Care

Context: Form 2 Biology

Introduction to the aim of the lessons:

The lessons

- This is the **second** of three lessons that are about creation care in a Maasai context to better prevent and prepare for the changes of climate change for a research project managed by Dr. Beth Elness-Hanson.

The surveys

- There is no survey with lesson 2.
- There are surveys before lesson 1 and after lesson 3.

Lesson 2) Pastoralist Maasai Traditional Environmental Knowledge for Creation Care

Name	**2) Pastoralist Maasai Traditional Environmental Knowledge for Creation Care**	**Teaching Equipment Needed**	• Visual aids (charts, pictures) on environmental care • Bible for the teacher (preferably with relevant verses marked) • ~~Handouts on Maasai environmental practices~~ • Writing materials (pens, paper) • Flip chart or whiteboard
Context	Form 2 Biology	**Student Supplies/ Handouts**	• ~~Handout on Maasai traditional practices for environmental care~~ • Scripture references on creation care • Reflection questions for group discussion

Main Point		**The Maasai traditional environmental knowledge aligns with biblical principles of creation care (where God calls us to be stewards of the Earth [Lesson 1]).**
Learning Outcomes	As a result of this lesson, the learner will:	
Cognitive: Know 	**Bible**  • **Review:** Understand that caring for creation in line with biblical principles is a sacred duty given by God. • Know that the "biblical creation triangle" refers to the relationship between **God, humanity, and non-human creation.** **Maasai**  • **Review:** Know how Maasai traditional environmental knowledge (TEK) reflects a similar sense of duty and responsibility toward the environment. • Understand how the Maasai traditional worldview—illustrated by the three-legged stool—is similar to the "biblical creation triangle."	

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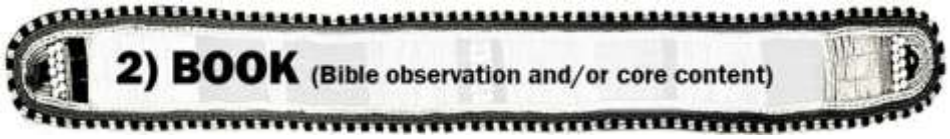
	Science **Review:** Understand the core concepts of climate science (i.e., climate change, greenhouse effect, human caused GHGs) and their effects on ecosystems and humans • **Review:** Realize that climate science intersects with the spiritual and ethical dimensions of environmental stewardship described in biblical teachings. • **Review:** Understand how climate change impacts the Maasai community's environment and traditional way of life. • Deepen understanding of how both Maasai traditions and climate science emphasize the importance of living in harmony with the environment and protecting natural resources. • Understand the role of grasslands as a very effective carbon sink. • Understand that science has studied and determined best practices to protect and care for living things and their environment to help restore or maintain a balance in nature. **Hope** • Understand that despite the current challenges, the Bible teaches that God created the earth with a purpose and will bring a future restoration of creation (Revelation 21:1–4). • Our efforts to address climate change are part of working towards this hopeful future.
Affective: Feel	• **A deep sense of love, respect, and responsibility** for God's creation (referenced from the ancient wisdom of Bible verses) • **Communal connection** to the land by highlighting stories from the Maasai traditions • **Inspired** by Maasai TEK, sustainable practices, and harmonious relationship with the land. • **Empowered** to blend these traditional practices with contemporary environmental science strategies to enhancing stewardship and sustainability
Applicative: Do	• Ask learners to identify one or two traditional Maasai practices they can adopt or promote in their community to enhance environmental stewardship. • Ask learners to reflect on how they can integrate both Maasai knowledge and biblical teachings in their daily lives to care for the environment. • OR Song competition (MGLSS & Moringe 2025)

Time	Content
8	**1) HOOK** (Attention getter) From the traditional Maasai perspective, it is believed that the ancestor of the Maasai was God, and *Enkai* gave sticks and rope for the herds. • **Storytelling Activity (same groups of 2 or 3 from lesson 1):**

	○ Think about one of the traditional Maasai stories you know that emphasizes the importance of caring for the land. This could be a story about the relationship between the Maasai and their cattle, highlighting the balance they maintain with nature. ○ Summarize the story in 2 minutes with a conversation partner. ○ See Maasai information in Resources if needed.
1	**Transition statement: (connecting Hook to Main Point)** There is a deep-rooted belief that reflects the Maasai's unique relationship with nature and their role as caretaking of the land. By understanding their traditions, we can explore how such cultural perspectives shape their interactions with the environment and inform broader lessons about sustainability and coexistence. Let's explore them now!
10	 **Maasai Traditional Environmental Knowledge**  Maasai **traditional environmental knowledge (TEK)** is deeply tied to their relationship with nature and the land. The Maasai see themselves as **guardians or caretakers** of the earth, responsible for protecting and maintaining the balance of the environment, especially in relation to their cattle, land, and natural resources. Here are key points about Maasai caretaking: 1. **Respect for the Land**: The Maasai believe the land is sacred and must be treated with respect. They use the land for grazing cattle, farming, and living, but they also make sure to preserve it. This includes rotational grazing, which involves moving their herds between different pastures. This technique prevents overgrazing in any single area, allowing vegetation to recover and maintain soil health. 2. **Sustainable Grazing**: The Maasai are known for their careful management of cattle. They move their herds regularly to avoid overgrazing any one area, allowing the grass and plants to regrow. This ensures that the land stays healthy and can continue to support life. 3. **Water Conservation**: Water is very important to the Maasai, especially in the dry seasons, due to the arid and semi-arid regions they inhabit. They know where to find water sources, and they use them wisely, making sure not to waste water. They carefully manage water sources, using them sparingly and ensuring that they are not overused. This includes practices like digging shallow wells, using water pans, and protecting water catchment areas to ensure that water remains available during dry seasons. 4. **Spiritual Connection to Nature**: The Maasai have a strong spiritual connection to nature. They believe that the land, animals, and the sky are all gifts from God (Enkai), and it is their responsibility to care for them. Their traditional practices, such as not permanently selling land and managing resources, reflect this belief. This includes preserving **Sacred Natural**

Sites. Certain natural sites and landscapes, such as specific trees, rocks, or water sources, are considered sacred by the Maasai. These sites are protected from exploitation and disturbance, preserving biodiversity and ecological balance.

5. **Passing Down Knowledge**:
   The Maasai pass down knowledge about caretaking from generation to generation. Elders teach the younger members of the community how to take care of the cattle, the land, and the environment, ensuring that future generations continue to respect and care for nature.

See more in the Resources below.

This Maasai understanding—or **worldview**—can be symbolized by a **three-legged stool.**

- The Maasai understand that human flourishing (well-being) in life comes from harmonious relationships with 1) *Engai*, 2) other people, and 3) non-human creation.
  - These three aspects are seen as a three-legged stool, *olorika*.
  - With three legs, it can be stable—even on uneven ground—and work well.

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Biblical "Creation Triangle"

The Maasai worldview is similar to what is seen in the Bible, what is called the biblical "creation triangle."

- The biblical understanding is that human flourishing (Shalom/peace/holistic well-being) in life comes from being in a right relationship with 1) God, 2) other people, and 3) non-human creation.
- Thus, there is a core shared understanding of God's world that is shared between Christians and Maasai.
- This shared understanding means that biblical teachings of creation care align with Maasai understandings, and Maasai traditional understandings affirm the Bible's ancient wisdom.

Bible Exploration Activity

- Break students into small groups of 2 to 3 students. Each group is assigned one Bible text: **Genesis 1:26–28, Psalm 24:1–2, Leviticus 25:1–7.**
- Ask them to read the scripture and discuss the following questions:
  - What does it say about God's ownership of the earth?
  - What responsibility does it give humans?
  - How does this apply to our lives today in terms of environmental caretaking?
- After small-group discussion, have a reporter from each group present their insights. If limited time, have one reporter from each text share, and invite the others to add missing aspects.

10

Maasai and Biblical Creation Care

- **Group Discussion:** Students continue in their small groups and provided with reflection questions:
  - How do the Maasai practices align with the concept of stewardship found in the Bible?
  - What can we learn from these practices that can be applied today?
  - How does understanding Maasai environmental knowledge deepen our understanding of God's command to care for creation?

Note: Students are given time for each group to share their insights.

Notes for discussion:

- **In relation to the biblical principles and Maasai practices,** both traditions reflect a deep respect for God's creation.
  - By viewing the land as sacred and managing it with care, the Maasai exemplify the stewardship role that the Bible entrusts to humanity, treating the earth not as a possession but as a divine gift to be preserved and respected.
- **Rotational grazing and Sabbath year rest:**
  - The Israelites were instructed to refrain from working the land during the Sabbath year.
  - The Maasai conservation efforts reflect a recognition that natural resources are finite and must be used responsibly to avoid depletion. The Maasai recognize that overgrazing can lead to land degradation, loss of vegetation, and soil erosion, which would harm the environment and reduce the land's ability to support life. By rotating grazing areas, the Maasai not only preserve the land's fertility but also ensure that it can continue to provide for future generations.
- Also, by studying these practices, we gain practical insights and a deeper understanding of how to fulfill God's command to care for God's creation in a way that honors both the environment and the Creator.

Note: In the next lesson, there will be a discussion of how Maasai TEK aligns with climate science.

4

Look continued: Hope

- *Hope* in the Maasai context aligns with the concept of stewardship found in the Bible is the **belief in a sustainable, harmonious future,** where humans actively care for the earth and its resources.
- Both the Maasai and the Bible emphasize the responsibility of humans to care for creation, ensuring its health and sustainability for future generations. This not only ensures a balanced relationship with nature but also fulfills the biblical vision of humans living in harmony with God's creation.
- In the Maasai traditions, the hope is reflected in their practices of maintaining ecological balance and sustainability, allowing the land to rest and regenerate. Similarly, the Bible expresses hope through teachings that encourage humans to care for creation as a lasting, sacred responsibility, ensuring the earth remains a place of blessing for generations to come.

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Applying TEK and Biblical Creation Care

- Ask learners to identify one or two traditional Maasai practices they can adopt or promote in their community to enhance environmental stewardship.
- Ask learners to reflect on how they can integrate both Maasai knowledge and biblical teachings in their daily lives to care for the environment.
- Learners are asked to write down their commitment and share it with a partner or group.

15

Song competition (For MGLSS and Moringe Sokoine, 2025)

Remember, as part of this special project, there will be a song competition.

- Get in the same groups from the first lesson, continue writing your song to the same traditional Maasai tune.
- Your first verse was about God commissioning us to care for God's good creation.
- Now write the **second verse** of a song **about traditional Maasai environmental knowledge** and practices that are also best practices of climate change mitigation (reduction).
- Remember, the guidelines are:
    1. Take a traditional Maasai tune and write new words based on this lesson.
    2. You can adapt the traditional Maasai tune, but it must be something that your family back in Maasailand will enjoy.
    3. The language must be Maa.
    4. The content of the verses needs to connect to the lesson content.
    5. There will be a minimum of 3 verses, one for each lesson.
    6. Your group must be a minimum of 3 Maasai students who are in the classroom now. You can have more people.
    7. Later, we will have a competition judged by Dr. Seth Sululu, a Maasai professor of music at Tumaini University Makumira.
    8. The winning group will have their song professionally produced at the Cultural Arts Center at TUMA for free distribution in Maasailand.
- To repeat our task: write the **second verse** of a song about traditional Maasai environmental knowledge and practices that are also best practices of climate change mitigation (reduction).

    Provide as much time as possible to work on writing a song verse.
    At the end of the time:
- Can we have 2 or 3 groups share their verse with us? Only volunteer if you are ready and can sing it without much delay.

    At the end of the lesson, encourage the development of the song verses.
- You may keep working on your verse for the song competition after classes.
- In the next and last lesson, you will also add one more verse. So, this project will continue to develop.

2	**Prayer** O *Enkai*, our God of the Sky and Earth, We come before you with humble hearts, grateful for the gifts of this land. We ask for your blessings as we tend to the land and our herds. Guide us in our grazing, so that we may rotate our pastures wisely and prevent the overuse of your precious soil. Help us manage the fires that renew the grasslands, allowing new life to flourish. Protect the sacred places that you have blessed, and let us honor them with reverence. Grant us the wisdom to conserve our water sources and share them fairly among our people. May we continue to cherish and protect the wildlife that roams alongside us, understanding that their presence is a sign of your grace and balance. We pledge to honor and sustain the beauty of your creation, O *Enkai*, in all that we do. Amen.
60	**End of Class**
	~~o **Controlled Burning:** Periodic, controlled burning of grasslands is used to manage and rejuvenate the land. This practice helps prevent the buildup of old vegetation, promotes the growth of new, nutrient-rich grass, and maintains the balance of plant species.~~

TEACHING NOTES:

Maasai Information

- **The Maasai, a semi-nomadic pastoralist** community in East Africa, have developed a range of environmental practices that contribute to ecological balance and sustainability. The Maasai live in harmony with nature, caring for their cattle as a gift from the land.
  - Their traditional knowledge and lifestyle offer valuable lessons for modern environmental conservation.
  - In recent decades, the Maasai have faced significant challenges, including land pressure due to population growth, changes in land tenure systems, and climate change.
  - These challenges have sometimes strained their traditional practices.
- **However**: The Maasai continue to adapt, blending their traditional knowledge with new strategies to sustain their way of life and care for the environment.
  - The Maasai's traditional environmental knowledge (TEK) is a testament to their deep understanding of and respect for the natural world.
  - Their practices of rotational grazing, water conservation, and communal land management have enabled them to live sustainably in challenging environments.
  - As modern challenges arise, the Maasai continue to adapt their traditional practices, ensuring that their cultural heritage of environmental caretaker remains vital in the care of creation in Tanzania.
  - Community-Based Wildlife Conservation: The Maasai have developed various community-based conservation initiatives that integrate wildlife protection with pastoralist practices. For instance, they participate in wildlife management programs and support conservation areas, recognizing the benefits of preserving wildlife for maintaining ecological health and promoting tourism.

If more time: Here are other teaching ideas

- **Organize a debate** on topics like "The Role of Culture in Environmental Conservation."
  - Use the Maasai example to highlight the value of cultural knowledge.
  - Pose a real-world problem, such as managing overgrazing or conserving water.
  - Challenge students to propose solutions using Maasai-inspired principles of caretaking and coexistence with nature.
- **Create a "Creation Care" Action Plan**
  - **Activity**: After reading and discussing the scriptures, have students create an "action plan" for how they, their school, or community can better care for the earth.
  - **Task**: The plan should be based on the biblical idea of stewardship, where they apply the principles of caring for the earth with reverence and responsibility.
  - **Outcome**: This encourages students to think practically about how they can implement biblical teachings in their daily lives.

Scientific analysis of Maasai traditional environmental knowledge (TEK)

The following content will be part of lesson 3, but it is included here for more understanding of Maasai TEK.

1. **Sustainable pastoralism** (semi-nomadic pasturing of cattle)
   - "…pastoralism was…a highly productive system of land use that was more compatible with wildlife conservation than other rural production systems."[1]
   - "Once vilified as a destructive land use, since the late 1980s pastoralism has come to be understood as the livelihood system most compatible with wildlife. Unlike agriculturalists, who directly compete with wildlife habitat for productive land, pastoralists typically manage their rangelands in ways that support both wildlife and livestock."[2]
   - "Pastoralism is the dominant livestock production system in most of Africa. Pastoral practices are based on local endogenous knowledge of both the environment and the animal. It is based on the continued capacity to adapt to a harsh environment, characterized by the scarcity, dispersion and variability of natural resources over vast territories."
   - Making strategic and sustainable use of land areas where, "Farming in the arid and semi-arid zones is socially unacceptable (low food security because of crop failure risks) and economically not feasible."[3] Arid lands "…are unsuitable for rainfed agriculture (the driest spot [in Monduli District] is Mfereji village in the rift valley with about 200 mm rainfall annually). Soils are generally shallow and not fertile."[4]
2. **Protecting biodiversity**
   - Not hunting wild animals or poaching, because they are not used as food sources.
   - Even lion hunting, a former prestigious act for a warrior, is no longer supported.
3. **Protecting ecosystems**
   - "Manzano and others pointed to a growing body of scholarly research demonstrating what the Maasai had long known: that their management of the land did not degrade the Serengeti ecosystem but had actually helped sustain and even create it—the grasslands the Maasai had cultivated for hundreds of years were the same grasslands that many wild animals needed to thrive."[5]
   - Not cutting down wood, in general, no logging industry; no mangrove destruction. Rather scrounging for deadwood for fires.
   - Not burning for slash and burn agriculture. Perhaps limited burns for pest management.
   - Not making charcoal.

4. **Preserving grasslands, which are carbon sinks** (meaning they have the ability to store large amounts of carbon). (Grasslands are also an ecosystem, but it will have special focus here in a Maasai context.)
    - Allowing grasslands to rest during the dry season [by moving to *osupuko*] and return from high grounds [*osupuko*] to go to low grounds [*olpurkel*] when the rains return, which is a good way of managing grass, trees, flowers [flora]).
    - "Grasslands store approximately 34% of the global terrestrial stock of carbon according to the World Resources Institute. Unlike forests where vegetation is the primary source of carbon storage, most of the grassland carbon is stored in the soil."[6]
    - "Increased drought and wildfire risk make grasslands more reliable carbon sinks than trees…Trees are still critical. The study does not suggest that grasslands should replace forests on the landscape or diminish the many other benefits of trees."[7]
5. **Environmentally sustainable livelihoods**
    - Not engaged in carbon generating industries/agro-business/etc.
    - No CO_2 producing industry. However, cows do produce some methane, CH_4.
    - Not using artificial fertilizers that cause phosphate and nitrate runoff and water pollution. Not using herbicides and pesticides used in agro-business.
    - No blast fishing.
    - No mining industries, which put arsenic, lead, copper pollution or contamination into groundwater.
    - No hydrocarbon oil spills from shipping refuse on the ports and plastic wastes from land-based sources as well as excess nutrients from wastewater disposal in the ocean.
    - Traditional Maasai pastoralists do not significantly contribute to the environmental challenges of urban cities.

Resource Articles

1. Creation Care & Environmental Stewardship

Wangari Maathai (Kenyan Environmentalist and Nobel Laureate)
The Challenge for Africa (2009)
"Indigenous knowledge and traditions can teach us valuable lessons in environmental stewardship and how to live in harmony with the land, honoring both creation and the Creator."

Katharine Hayhoe (Climate Scientist and Evangelical Christian)
"Caring for the earth is an expression of our love for God and for our neighbors, and should be an essential part of the Christian mission in the world."

2. Ecotheology & Spirituality

Nyambura J. Njoroge (African Theologian)
"For African communities, creation care is not only an ecological practice but a spiritual one, deeply rooted in our cultural beliefs about the sacredness of the earth and its connection to the divine."

Beverly E. W. (Women's Environmental Advocate)
"Women's roles in environmental conservation are not just about resource management, but also about preserving the sacred relationships between community, land, and God."

3. Gender & Environmental Justice

Beverly E. W. (Women's Environmental Advocate)
A scholar focused on **ecotheology** and **women's roles** in environmental justice, her work examines how women in different parts of the world contribute to **sustainable environmental practices** rooted in faith and stewardship.

Resource Books

1. Maasai Ecological Practices & Sustainability

Homewood, Katherine. *Ecology of Pastoralism: The Maasai of East Africa*. Routledge, 2019.
"The Maasai's ecological practices, grounded in traditional knowledge, reflect a sophisticated understanding of environmental balance and sustainability, essential for the long-term health of their landscapes."

Nugent, Paul. *Smelling the Roses: Land Use and Livelihoods among the Maasai*. Oxford University Press, 2009.
"The Maasai's land management strategies, including their rotational grazing systems, are not merely traditional practices but reflect a deep-seated ecological wisdom that ensures resource sustainability."

Bertram, Chris, and Chantal Vivier. *Pastoralism and Development in Africa: Dynamic Change at the Margins*. Routledge, 2018.
"Understanding Maasai environmental practices reveals the intricate connection between pastoral lifestyles and sustainable land management, highlighting how traditional knowledge can contribute to modern environmental solutions."

2. Traditional Knowledge and Environmental Stewardship

Maathai, Wangari. *The Challenge for Africa*. Pantheon Books, 2009.
"Indigenous practices, such as those of the Maasai, offer invaluable lessons in environmental stewardship, illustrating how traditional knowledge can inform and enhance modern conservation efforts."

Spear, Thomas. *The Maasai of Matapato: A Study of Rituals of Rebellion*. University of Chicago Press, 1981.
"Maasai rituals and cultural practices are intertwined with environmental stewardship, demonstrating how cultural norms can shape and sustain ecological practices."

3. The Role of Women and Africans in Conservation

In response to your comment on celebrating women and Africans, **Wangari Maathai**, a prominent African environmentalist and Nobel Peace Prize laureate, often emphasized the **importance of indigenous knowledge**, which is essential to modern conservation efforts. Both Maathai's and other African scholars' works underline that African practices—particularly from groups like the Maasai—are **crucial to sustainable development** and offer **lessons for the rest of the world** in balancing **tradition with modern ecological needs**.

[1] Benjamin Gardner, *Selling the Serengeti: The Cultural Politics of Safari Tourism* (Athens, London: University of Georgia Press, 2016), 6.
[2] Gardner, 24.
[3] J. Douwe Meindertsma and Jan J. Kessler, eds., *Planning for a Better Environment in Monduli District* (Rotterdam: Netherlands Economic Institute, 1997), 46.
[4] Meindertsma and Kessler, 43.
[5] Stephanie McCrummen, "'This Will Finish Us,'" *The Atlantic*, April 8, 2024, 25.
[6] Gord Vaadeland, "Grasslands, Forests & Wetlands - Nature's Carbon Capture & Storage Solution," CPAWS, March 22, 2016, https://cpaws.org/grasslands-forests-wetlands-natures-carbon-capture-storage-solution/.
[7] Katherine E. Kerlin, "Grasslands More Reliable Carbon Sink Than Trees," University of California–Davis, July 9, 2018, https://climatechange.ucdavis.edu/climate/news/grasslands-more-reliable-carbon-sink-than-trees.